

PCD2017/02/14

FORBES CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS
JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

School of Music

presents the

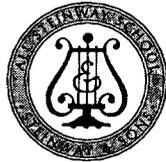
36th Contemporary Music Festival

Guest Artists
Augusta Read Thomas, *composer*
Argus Quartet
Triplepoint Trio

Concert I

featuring
Madison Modern Music Ensemble

Tuesday, February 14, 2017
8 pm
Concert Hall



There is no intermission.

Program

Pulsar (2003).....Augusta Read Thomas (b. 1964)

Diane Phoenix-Neal, *viola*

Sun Songs – Three Micro-Operas (2004).....Augusta Read Thomas

Maya Davis, *mezzo-soprano*

Caleb Pickering, Paige Durr, Lucas Garner, *percussion*

Gravity Well (2015).....Jason Haney (b. 1969)

Chris Carrillo, *trumpet*

Casey Cangelosi, *percussion* | Larry Taylor, *piano*

Sonata Romantique *Hommage a Brahms* (1982).....Frenenc Farkas

Allergo agitato

(1905-2000)

Allergo molto

Andante moderato, *espressivo*

Allegro vivace

Sue Barber, *bassoon* | Lori Piitz, *piano*

Canteyodjaya (1949).....Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992)

Jenny Jiang, *piano*

Scat (2007).....Augusta Read Thomas

Madison Modern Music Ensemble

Schuyler Thornton, *flute* | Tony Moran, *clarinet*

Michael Tyree, *violin* | Patrick Bellah, *cello*

Gianne Ge Zhu, *piano* | Ben Bergey, *conductor*

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personal computers, and any other electronic devices.

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Program Notes

Pulsar: Every listener brings their own unique perspective to the listening process. In **Pulsar I** offer them aesthetic engagements with the world and with themselves as I, too, undertake a mission of self-discovery. Music of all kinds constantly amazes, surprises, propels and seduces me into wonderful and powerful journeys. I care deeply that music is not anonymous and generic — easily assimilated and just as easily dismissed and forgotten. **Pulsar** has passionate, urgent, seductive and compelling qualities of often complex (but always logical) thought allied to sensuous sonic profiles.

My favorite moment in any piece of music is that of maximum risk and striving. Whether the venture is tiny or large, loud or soft, fragile or strong, passionate, erratic or eccentric — the moment of exquisite humanity and raw soul! All art that I cherish has elements of order, mystery, love, recklessness and desperation. For me, music must be alive and jump off the page and out of the instrument as if **SOMETHING BIG IS AT STAKE**. This artistic credo leads me to examine small musical objects (a chord, a motive, a rhythm, a color) and explore them from many perspectives. These different perspectives reveal new musical potentials which develop the musical discourse. In this manner, and in **Pulsar** in particular, the music takes on an organic, circular, self-referential character which, at the same time, has a forward progression. **Pulsar**, for solo violin, was commissioned by the BBC, jointly with the Royal Philharmonic Society, composed for and premiered by Ilya Gringolts. The premiere took place on March 17th at the Wigmore Hall in London. — Augusta Read Thomas

Program Notes (cont'd)

Sun Songs: If there's one thing Emily Dickinson knew for sure, it was what a good poem should do. "If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry," she wrote. Dickinson was attempting to describe for her sister-in-law the power of poetry to envelop and even to devastate the reader (or listener). Her physical description was an effort to convey that successful poems are not weakling, tiny delightful breezes or passages or bookish exercises; they are chillingly theatrical and annihilating. Composing for voice is my first passion in life, and as a result the largest part of my catalogue is music for voice: solo voice, chamber opera, small groups of voices, small or large choirs, with and without orchestral or other kinds of accompaniments. For me, the human voice — possibly the most subtle, complex, and fragile yet forceful, flexible, seductive, and persuasive carrier of musical ideas and meanings — has always been an inspiration for and influence upon my entire musical thinking. I sing when I compose. I adore reading poems, and cherish the opportunity to set them to music; and I believe that text plus music (1+1) must equal at least 24. If $1+1=2$, there is no need, for me, to set the text to music.

Emily Dickinson's poems are intensely personal, intellectual, introspective, and offer a meditation on life, death, and poetic creation; her poems share a close observation of nature as well as consideration of religious and philosophical issues. Poetry, the Belle of Amherst knew, is that form of communication in which words are never simple equivalents of experience or perception. The words themselves, the words as words, have a life as sounds, as images, as the means for generating a series of associations, and as such are very inspiring. Poets insist on seeing and hearing words as if each is a multi-faceted gem has, in the hands of the skillful artist, the capacity to resonate and to go in multiple directions at once.

Sun Songs - Three Micro-Operas, for Mezzo-soprano (or Soprano or Countertenor) and 3 Percussion was commissioned by DePauw University School of Music. Amy Barber and her colleagues presented the world premiere performance on 26 February, 2006. The Three Micro-Operas, all setting poems about the sun by Emily Dickinson, are colorful, varied, and last a total of about 8 minutes.
— Augusta Read Thomas

Gravity Well: Commissioned in 2015 by trumpeter Chris Carrillo, *Gravity Well* is an eight-minute work for trumpet, percussion and piano. The opening, which has the members of the ensemble rotating around the pitches of a slowly evolving harmony, reminded me of objects orbiting in space. Bowed vibraphone is also used at the beginning to supplement the resonance of the piano. Later in the piece, a faster section increases the momentum, the bongos, log drums and wood block come into play, and eventually all three players converge on a single pitch at the conclusion, like a singularity toward which the whole piece has been inexorably drawn. — Jason Haney

Sonata Romantique: The Sonata Romantique was written in 1982 by Hungarian composer Ferenc Farkas and is a richly colorful and playful composition that infuses modern tonal language with elements of the traditional formal structure of a sonata. It bears the subtitle "Hommage à Brahms" and in a nod to the 19th century composer, Farkas uses a theme, which is most clearly stated in the opening measures of the lyrical third movement, that is based on the notes that "spell" BRAHMS: b flat (B) – d (R) – a (A) – b natural (H) – e (M) – e flat (S). This signature is also present in the first movement of the sonata. The delightful first movement is written in the sonata form contrasting several obvious recurring themes with a clear recapitulation

Program Notes (cont'd)

of the main theme. Traditional tonal relationships and structures associated with the sonata form are present but not followed strictly as composers in the 18th or 19th centuries might have done in their respective time periods. The lively Scherzo that follows is characterized by intricate rhythmic patterns that shift quickly throughout the movement. The sonata concludes with an energetic *Allegro vivace* in which Farkas again contrasts themes in a fairly obvious manner. —Sue Barber (2016)

Cantéyodjayâ is a single movement piece written by Olivier Messiaen in 1948. *Cantéyodjayâ* was inspired by Hindu Rhythms, experiments with total serialism, and foreshadows some ideas and sounds for his later collection of birdsongs. The opening two-bar motive is a hint to identify the switches between musical ideas and sections. In the first half of the composition, this motive appears repeatedly between "djaya", "alba" and other sections. Messiaen emphasizes the use of total serialism in this composition. The total serialism section using three individual melody lines. Each voice has eight notes with fixed pitch, duration and dynamic. After this section, about one third of through the piece, the opening motive disappeared until the very end. In the "Moderé" sections, "retrograde" (backward) and "droite" (forward) are marked on the score. The top voice has its own seven-note melody, started with a thirty-second note, repeated three times, each time moves an octave lower and becomes slower by adding a thirty-second note to its value, ends on approximately a half dotted note; while the bottom voice plays an ascending line, starts with a half note, getting faster by reducing a thirty-second note value and ends up a thirty-second note.

In this composition, Messiaen quoted melodies or chords from his earlier compositions, such as *Cinq rechants* (1948), *Turangalîla-Symphonie*, (1946-48), *Harawi* (1944-45) and *Vingt regards sur l'Enfant-Jesus* (1944). Scholar Healey said, "This is a summary of Messiaen's technical innovations to that date and a demonstration of his ability to compose an entirely satisfying piece from an unprecedented amount of disparate elements." This is why *Cantéyodjayâ* is strikingly fascinating and challenging to both performance and audience alike.

Scat: Commissioned and premiered in 2007 by the Walden Chamber Players in Western Massachusetts at a men's Jail and House of Correction, SCAT, scored for flute (or oboe), violin, viola, cello, piano (or harpsichord,) has a duration of 6 minutes. The title refers to a style of singing where the voice is used in imitation of an instrument, vocalizing either wordlessly or with nonsense words and syllables (e.g. "bippity-bippity-doo-wop-razzamatazz-skoobie-doo-bee-bop-a-lula-shabazz") often employed by *jazz singers* who then create the equivalent of an instrumental solo using only their *voice*. Scat singers do not use the sounds to exactly reproduce the instrumental melody, instead, they improvise with the melody and rhythm and tempo. In this very short chamber work, the instruments at times are imitating scat singers — who originally would have been imitating instruments — thus alluding to the turnaround, full-circle, ever spiraling and historically long standing exchange between instrumental and singing traditions' fields-of-influence on one another. — Augusta Read Thomas

Guest Composer Biography

The music of **Augusta Read Thomas** (b. 1964 in New York) is nuanced, majestic, elegant, capricious, lyrical, and colorful – *“it is boldly considered music that celebrates the sound of the instruments and reaffirms the vitality of orchestral music.”* (Philadelphia Inquirer) In February 2015, music critic Edward Reichel wrote, *“Augusta Read Thomas has secured for herself a permanent place in the pantheon of American composers of the 20th and 21st centuries. She is without question one of the best and most important composers that this country has today. Her music has substance and depth and a sense of purpose. She has a lot to say and she knows how to say it — and say it in a way that is intelligent yet appealing and sophisticated.”* The New York Times article of March 6, 2015 states that Thomas had the distinction of having her work performed more frequently in 2013-2014 than any other living ASCAP composer, according to statistics from performing rights organization. Former Chairperson of the American Music Center, she serves on many boards, is a generous citizen in the profession at large, and, according to the American Academy of Arts and Letters, *“has become one of the most recognizable and widely loved figures in American Music.”*

A Grammy winner, her impressive body of works embodies unbridled passion and fierce poetry. The New Yorker Magazine called her *“a true virtuoso composer.”* Championed by such luminaries as Barenboim, Rostropovich, Boulez, Eschenbach, Salonen, Maazel, Ozawa, and Knussen, she rose early to the top of her profession. As an influential teacher at Eastman, Northwestern, Tanglewood, Aspen Music Festival, now she is the 16th ever University Professor (one of only 7 current University Professors) at the University of Chicago. Augusta said, *“Teaching is a natural extension of my creative process and of my enthusiasm for the music of others.”*

Thomas was the longest-serving Mead Composer-in-Residence for Daniel Barenboim and Pierre Boulez with the Chicago Symphony from 1997 through 2006, a residency that culminated in the premiere of *Astral Canticle* – one of two finalists for the 2007 Pulitzer Prize in Music. During her residency, Thomas not only premiered nine commissioned orchestral works, but also was central toward establishing the thriving MusicNOW series on which she commissioned and programmed the work of many living composers. Recent and upcoming commissions include those from the Boston Symphony, the Utah Symphony, Wigmore Hall in London, JACK quartet, Third Coast Percussion, Tanglewood, the Danish Chamber Players, Notre Dame University, and the Fromm Foundation. She won the Ernst von Siemens Music Prize among many other coveted awards. She is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Ms. Thomas studied composition with Oliver Knussen at Tanglewood (1986, 1987, 1989), Jacob Druckman at Yale University (1988), with Alan Stout and Bill Karlins at Northwestern University (1983-1987), and at the Royal Academy of Music in London (1989). She was a Junior Fellow in the Society of Fellows at Harvard University (1991-94) and a Bunting Fellow at Radcliffe College (1990-91).

Donald Rosenberg of Gramophone wrote, *“Heart and soul in the breathtaking music of a thoughtful contemporary composer. Thomas’s brainy brand of modernism reveals a lively, probing mind allied to a beating heart.”*

About the Festival

Special Thanks

Contemporary Music Festival Committee

Casey Cangelosi, Gabriel Dobner, Eric Guinivan, Jason Haney, Dorothy Maddison, John Peterson, Sam Suggs

School of Music Faculty, Staff and Students

Jeff Bush, *Director of the School of Music*

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Regan Byrne, *Executive Director of the Forbes Center for the Performing Arts*

Shawn Tucker, Bradley Monahan, Tom Carr, *Forbes-Center Production and Technical Staff*

JMU Visiting Scholars Program

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The first JMU Contemporary Music Festival was held in 1981, initiated by then-director of the School of Music Joe Estock and faculty composer John Hilliard. In the years since, the festival has hosted many of the most prominent composers and performers of new music in the world today. Recent guest artists include:

Stephen Hartke
The Virginia Sinfonietta
Roger Reynolds
JACK Quartet
American Modern Ensemble
Sir Peter Maxwell Davies
Alarm Will Sound
Steven Stucky
Steve Reich
New Millennium Ensemble
George Tsontakis
Samuel Adler
George Crumb
Donald Erb
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John Harbison
Karel Husa
Libby Larsen
David Maslanka
Thea Musgrave
The New Music Consort
Joseph Schwantner
Joan Tower
Chinary Ung
Chen Yi

Next academic year, the festival moves to the fall, October 23-25, 2017, with a program celebrating the sesquicentennial of Canada, featuring music by Canadian composers. Check the JMU School of Music website for updates as the festival approaches!

Upcoming Events

February 2017

JMU Jazz Combos	Tues., Feb. 14 @ 7-9, Artful Dodger
<i>Contemp. Music Festival</i> , Student Composers	Wed., Feb. 15 @ 5 PM, Recital Hall*
<i>Contemp. Music Festival</i> , Concert II	Wed., Feb. 15 @ 8 PM, Concert Hall*
<i>Contemp. Music Festival</i> , Concert III	Thurs., Feb. 16 @ 8 PM, Concert Hall*
JMU Brass Band	Sat., Feb. 18 @ 8 PM, Concert Hall*
JMU Chorale and Symphony Orchestra	Sun., Feb. 19 @ 4 PM, Washington, D.C.
School of Music Auditions	Mon., Feb. 20, All Day, Forbes Center

*These concerts provide student credit for MUS 195.

For tickets and further information, visit www.jmuforbescenter.com or call the Forbes Center Box Office at (540) 568-7000. For more on the School of Music, go to www.jmu.edu/music or call (540) 568-6714.

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